



STATE OF WISCONSIN
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
BARBARA LAWTON

Tuesday, November 16, 2004

Contact: Larry J. Martin, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, (608) 266-3516
Christine Lidbury, Wisconsin Women's Council, (608) 266-2219

NATIONAL REPORT ON STATUS OF WOMEN IN WISCONSIN HIGHLIGHTS MAJOR DISPARITIES FACED BY WOMEN OF COLOR

In recent decades, women in Wisconsin have made significant economic, political and social advances. However, the status of women in the state still lags in many important areas – particularly for the state's women of color. So concludes the 2004 Status of Women in Wisconsin Report, just published by the Washington D.C. Institute for Women's Policy Research and the Women's Fund of the Greater Milwaukee Area Community Foundation.

Lieutenant Governor Barbara Lawton's *Wisconsin Women = Prosperity* economic development initiative and the State of Wisconsin's Women's Council joined other leading Wisconsin women's groups to commission the update. "This new data figures at the center of our equation as we work to add it up: what is the cost to our state when Wisconsin's women are sidelined by persistent barriers to success? How do we rid our institutions and practices of gender and racial discrimination, once and for all?" Lawton said. "The update will sharpen our recommendations to be sure we raise the grade for all Wisconsin's women. Then Wisconsin's economy will roar." The Institute for Women's Policy Research has invited Lawton to be their keynote speaker at the 2005 convention to report on Wisconsin's groundbreaking work with *Wisconsin Women = Prosperity*.

The update to the 2002 Status Report shows that Wisconsin women are making progress in some areas. "We've made great progress in Wisconsin over the past two years," said Governor Jim Doyle. "But we still have work to do. As this report reminds us, there are still significant disparities in our state. My administration is committed to extending opportunity to all Wisconsin citizens. We want our state to be a place where all citizens can find a family supporting job, have access to quality, affordable health care, and enjoy all the good things that life in Wisconsin has to offer."

The results are sobering. Among the 2004 Report's findings:

- More Likely to Live in Poverty Wisconsin's women of color, especially single women with children, are much more likely to live in poverty than white women. African American women in Wisconsin are the least likely to live above poverty than all racial groups and are the only group for which poverty is more prevalent in Wisconsin than in the nation. Among the state's single-mother families, nearly 1 in 2 African American, 1 in 3 Hispanic, 1 in 4 Asian American and Native American, and 1 in 5 white families live in poverty.
- Lower Educational Attainment The 2001-2002 high school graduation rate for African American females in Wisconsin was about 65% – an increase over the previous year but still significantly lower than the rate of 92% for all Wisconsin females. Perhaps as a result, African American women are about half as likely to have a college degree as white women; however, it is Native American women who have the lowest levels of college education of any other racial or ethnic group in the state.
- Lower Earnings ... While Wisconsin ranks 5th highest in the nation for the number of women who participate in the labor force, the state is 45th in the nation for its wage gap (the ratio of men and women's earnings). In Wisconsin, for every dollar a white man earns, white women earn the most at about 68 cents on the dollar (compared to 70 cents nationally), African American women earn 63 cents, and Hispanic women earn the lowest at 59 cents on the dollar.
- ... and Job Prospects Women of color fare much worse in terms of employment and earnings than white women, in other areas as well. They are generally less likely to hold professional and managerial occupations. Hispanic women earn the lowest annual wages of all major racial and ethnic groups and are least likely to be union members than those from other racial and ethnic groups. Wisconsin's African American women experience unemployment at nearly four times the rate of white women and nearly twice the rate for African American women nationally.
- Poorer Health Outcomes Mortality from heart disease continues to rise in Wisconsin, from 132.6 per 100,000 in the 2002 report to 185.4 in 2004. The rates are substantially higher among African American and Native American women at rates of 242 and 212 per 100,000, respectively.
- ... and Their Infants Native American women are among the most likely in the state to experience low birth weight in their infants, while African American women experience infant mortality rates at more than three times that of white women and higher in Wisconsin than nationally. Contrary to national trends, Hispanic infants are more likely than white infants to die before age one in Wisconsin.
- Unique Demographic Challenges Asian American women tend to fare better than other women of color in the nation; however, this is not true for Wisconsin where the largest and fastest growing Asian American population, the Hmong, face some of the greatest disparities on indicators of women social and economic status. For example, 75% of Hmong women have less than a high school education, compared with 14% of all women in Wisconsin.

In recognizing and documenting that different groups of women face greater challenges than others to improve their economic, political and social status, this report offers a platform for

developing public policy and social and economic programs that better reflect the realities of all of Wisconsin's women and families. "Seeking out the statistics on women of color is important to getting a true picture on the status of women in Wisconsin," said Kris Martinsek, chair of the Wisconsin Women's Council. "Because 9 out of 10 women in Wisconsin are white, reports tend to under represent – or lose altogether – critical data about the glaring disparities facing women of color in our state." Ensuring that all women have the opportunity to contribute their best effort as full and equal partners in work, politics, and communities is essential to their prosperity, to Wisconsin's prosperity, and to our nation's prosperity.

The state ranks in the top one-third of all states for indicators of women's political participation (at 12th) and social and economic autonomy (at 17th). Wisconsin falls among the middle range of states in areas of women's health and well-being (at 19th), employment and earnings (ranking 30th), and reproductive rights (at 34th).

The complete 2004 Status of Women in Wisconsin Report is available from the Women's Fund of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, which co-published the report, on their web site at: <http://www.womensfund.com/>. Hardcopies of the Report are available by calling the Women's Fund at (414) 290-7350.

Additional resources for and about Women in Wisconsin are available on the Wisconsin Women Council's web site at <http://www.womenscouncil.wi.gov/>. For more information about the Wisconsin Women = Prosperity, statewide economic development initiative, created by Lieutenant Governor Barbara Lawton, visit <http://www.wisconsinwomenequalsprosperity.org>.

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